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FM AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1452
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0421
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0227
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 0300
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY 0304
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L DUSHANBE 000146

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [RU](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: TAJIK-RUSSIAN RELATIONS COOL, ONLY TO WARM AGAIN

REF: A. (A) DUSHANBE 125
[1](#)B. (B) DUSHANBE 121
[1](#)C. (C) DUSHANBE 046
[1](#)D. (D) DUSHANBE 004

Classified By: Ambassador Tracey A. Jacobson, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Tajik-Russian relations seem to have hit a rough patch, mainly over perceived Russian support for Uzbekistan in Tajik-Uzbek water sharing disagreements. Resentments over mistreatment of Tajiks working in Russia and lack of work opportunities there has added to tensions. President Rahmon vacillated about whether to attend the CSTO meeting in Moscow in early February, and finally decided to go. This, and his warm welcome to the U.S. interest in northern supply routes to Afghanistan may partially have been motivated by a desire to show Russia that he has other friends. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On February 1 the government announced that Rahmon had, at the last minute, cancelled his trip to Moscow to participate in summits of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) and to meet with President Medvedev. He later reinstated it. Rahmon also cancelled then reinstated a subsequent trip to the Baltics, blaming both cancellations on the precarious energy situation in Tajikistan (ref B).

[1](#)3. (C) While undoubtedly true, that explanation only touched the surface. Dushanbe has been engaged in a war of words with Moscow over a number of different issues during the past two months, culminating in Tajikistan's angry reaction to a Medvedev statement in Tashkent, perceived as supporting Uzbekistan's position in a longstanding dispute over Central Asian water rights (ref A). Medvedev said on January 23 that hydropower projects in the region had to take into account the interests of all users of transboundary rivers. Tajikistan claims that the rivers in which it has numerous ongoing and prospective hydropower plants are completely internal, while Uzbekistan's position, which has received support from international organizations, is that Tajikistan's rivers are part of transboundary water systems that require international approval before being altered. The dispute has ratcheted up this winter as Tashkent has -- with little explanation -- blocked transit of Turkmen electricity, with Dushanbe countering by threatening to hold water back in the spring in order to replenish its reservoirs.

[1](#)4. (C) Even before Medvedev's statement, relations between Dushanbe and Moscow were troubled. In December the murder of a Tajik migrant worker in Russia generated an outpouring of popular anger in Tajikistan, including protests in front of the Russian Embassy. The Russian Embassy, although it issued

a statement regretting the loss of life, also responded by issuing an unusual public diplomatic note to the Tajik government complaining about the reporting of the Tajik media (ref D). In another twist on diplomatic relations, Tajik media in late January reported a rumor that the Government of Tajikistan had rejected the proposed new Russian Ambassador, because he was considered too low-ranking.

¶5. (C) Underlying this public back-and-forth has been the steadily increasing fear that the worsening world financial crisis may have profound affects on the prosperity of both countries. Russia's decision to halve the official quota on CIS guest workers in December) although its actual effects QCIS guest workers in December) although its actual effects remain debatable) has increased worries in Tajikistan about declining remittances that are crucial to their economy (ref C). Tajikistan's remittances, as a percentage of its GDP, are the highest in the world.

¶6. (C) The possible cancellation of the President's trip to Moscow received a tremendous amount of bated-breath media coverage in Tajikistan and farther afield. Part of the issue was that reliable information about the President's intentions were hard to come by) in all likelihood reflecting uncertainty in the presidential administration itself. News reports emerged every few minutes announcing that the trip was either back on or back off. Regardless of its position on the trip, almost every article accentuated the dramatic nature of a presidential cancellation, noting that Rahmon had never once failed to attend a CSTO summit.

¶7. (C) In the end, Rahmon went to Moscow. He and Medvedev must have made nice; on February 5 the presidential administration announced that Rahmon would return to Moscow this month for a working visit, and later in the year for a state visit.

¶8. (C) Tajikistan's difficulties with Russia may be responsible for its particularly warm reception of new linkages with other countries, including both the United States and Iran. Tajik media have reported on various local experts, including some affiliated with the government, reacting very favorably to NATO's proposed Northern Distribution Network (NDN) to supply troops in Afghanistan and saying Tajikistan was eager to host foreign military bases as a way to help stabilize Afghanistan and break the country's economic dependence on Russia. Even here, however, Tajikistan cannot act without its troublesome neighbor, since the freight lines that lead into the country pass through Uzbekistan.

¶9. (C) Rahmon also has very publicly welcomed economic cooperation with Tehran, voicing his approval for the creation of a Persian bloc including Iran, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan. Among other proposals, the thinking includes the development of transportation networks that bypass Uzbekistan, including an already begun railway linking Iran with the western Afghan city of Herat. Additional plans include the development of the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas to serve as an outlet for Tajik exports, particularly aluminum. Soon after Medvedev's unwelcome comments in Tashkent Rahmon spoke with President Ahmadinejad, and Dushanbe is now hosting the Iranian trade minister.

¶10. (C) Regardless of the severity of the row between Tajikistan and Russia, it is a bigger deal in Dushanbe than it is in Moscow. Dushanbe can hardly go its own way) it relies on Russia for everything, from imports to remittances to military security. The global economic crisis and the expanding U.S. operation in Afghanistan, and the possibility of the closure of the U.S. air base at Manas, Kyrgyzstan, have changed this relationship somewhat, and the Tajik leadership will try to play these changes to Tajikistan's financial advantage. But while Tajikistan wants to show Russia that it has other friends, the overwhelming weight of interests continues to bind Dushanbe to Moscow. The quick reconciliation during Rahmon's just-concluded visit to Moscow showed this clearly. End Comment.

